

after his new birth into Christ, declares that he was still reaching forth unto the things that were before, and pressing toward the goal. The path of the Christian is like unto a shining light, "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

The Sunday School

LESSON FOR SEPTEMBER 18

BY THE EDITOR

Captivity of the Ten Tribes.—II Kings 17:9-18

GOLDEN TEXT.—If thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever.—I Chron. 28:9.

LESSON THOUGHT.—Sin is slavery with a hard and cruel master.

Home Readings

Fruit of disobedience, II Kings 17:18.
Rejected of God, II Kings 17:19-29.
Prophecy of captivity, Hos. 10:1-8.
Consequences of sin, Isa. 1:1-9.
Punishment of pride, Isa. 9:8-17.
Sin of rejection, Matt. 21:33-43.

Introductory Notes

The lesson today tells the story of a sad funeral, one of the saddest that ever occurred. It was the funeral of a nation. What makes it so sad is that there was no hope of a resurrection. God himself mourns. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" Hosea 11:8. What were the causes of this captivity? This nation which God brought up out of Egypt, for which he did so much, will he now allow it to be destroyed and all his work come to naught? God himself enumerates these causes. (1) Ingratitude. Vs. 7, 9. (2) Israel did as the heathen. They adopted the laws, the practices, the abominations, the idolatry of the nations whom the Lord had cast out. (3) Secret idolatry. V. 9. (4) Open idolatry. Calves at Dan and Bethel, idols on every high hill and under every green tree. (5) Pressing on in sin against the warning of God. Vs. 13-16. Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea, testified against Israel. By many messages and calls he had warned them. By many promises he had wooed them. But against all these they hardened their hearts and rejected the counsel of God. The one great trouble with Israel was their unbelief, and that is the greatest sin of the nineteenth century as it has been of all other centuries. We have had warnings, and promises and threats. Let us not repeat Israel's history. God has come to us in many ways; in Christ, in the gospel, in his special providences, let us take heed to his wooings and warnings.

Meaning of the Text

Verse 9. The towers were placed in lonely spots and the meaning is that the high places were built everywhere, in the loneliest as well as in the most thickly settled places. Altars in groves on a hill were not always for worship, but rather for the licentiousness and revelry of idol worshippers.

V. 10. The R. V. reads, "Pillars and Asher," the first were slender stones like obelisks, and the latter were wooden images of a goddess Ashera.

V. 11. Israel did not take warning by the judgments brought upon these nations but continued in doing the very thing which brought evil upon others.

V. 12. Israel knew better for they had been taught by the Lord that idolatry was sin. Exodus 20:4, and in many other places.

V. 13. The people did not go into this thing without warning, for the Lord had sent them many teachers to instruct them and warn them of the coming ruin if they continued in their wicked ways. Two classes are here spoken of, first the prophets, who spoke forth what God would say to men, second, the seers, who see the visions God reveals. This was the burden of the prophets and God's teachers before the captivity. All the prophets from Samuel to Malachi had this message.

V. 14. The appeals of the Lord thro his prophets were of no avail, the people would not hear but treated with contempt the message from the Lord. They "hardened their necks," like oxen, when stubborn, they set their necks firm in the way they would go, and all efforts to guide them were useless.

V. 15. The people not only refused to hear and believe, but as a natural result of their unbelief, they threw off the yoke of God altogether and refused to do any bidding of the Lord's. The law is called a covenant because it was an agreement between God and his people. God had promised to protect and defend them, but it was on condition that they obey him. God always kept his part of the agreement. Their idolatry is designated nothing, because such gods could not help them in time of need.

V. 16. The people became guilty of breaking the entire decalogue, not observing even one of them. They worshipped the heavenly bodies instead of worshipping him who created them.

V. 17. In the worship of Moloch they made the children pass thro fire and actually burnt them, laid them in the red hot arms of the idol. By divination is meant some way of seeking guidance by lots, and enchantments refers to the use of omens. Both were methods of seeking to know the future.

V. 18. Humanly speaking they were removed out of his sight, taken away from his land, cutting them off from his favor and oversight. They were still in God's sight in one sense, but they were not under his care and protection. It is a sorrowful picture presented here as to the results of Israel's disobedience, a picture which should be a warning to all people.

The Lesson Applied

1. *Israel in Captivity.*—This was the final act and end of the people's sin. God had warned them, sent them prophets and teachers, and in every possible way consistent with the free moral agency of man, en-

deavored to lead Israel to repentance, but they would not. They disregarded all the pleadings, the warnings and threats of the Lord. They persisted in their sin and evil doing and now the end has come. Fearful judgment came upon them. They were carried away captive by the king of Syria. It is well that those who are given to trifling with sin should take a warning from this bit of history. Many are disregarding the commands of Christ going on in their sin, as tho judgment would forever be withheld. But the day of doom is coming, let them take warning, God's spirit will not always strive with them. The reason given for the captivity of Israel is that the children of Israel sinned against the Lord. Sin always brings ruin and destruction. It may be late coming sometimes, but it will come.

2. *Secret Wrong Doing.*—It is related here that the children of Israel did that which was not right but they did it secretly. But it should be remembered that all their acts were open to the eyes of God, and that secret sins work ruin just as certain as open ones. This lesson needs to be deeply impressed, for there are many who seem to think they can go on in their evil ways, that as long as the public does not know about them they are all right. But in this they are mistaken. Hypocrisy only adds to one's sins and invites destruction. No one can continue a hypocrite very long without being found out. "Be sure your sin will be found out."

3. *God's Mercy.*—Do you ask, Where is God's mercy in permitting Israel to be carried away captive? It was the necessary consequence of sin. Better have the people carried away than have the nations destroyed. He had given them warning. He plead with them, but they would not hear, and even God could not save a people who did not want to be saved. Divine mercy will not save the sinner unless he accepts the offers of mercy. Men perish in spite of the grace of God. God's mercy is seen in offering a remedy for sin, salvation from sin, and the gift of eternal life. Those who reject the gracious offer can not cry against the mercy of God, for it is their own foolishness that has caused their ruin. Let it be known that God is kind and merciful but not too kind and merciful to deal out punishment and permit judgment to come upon those who wilfully disobey his word and disregard his warnings. The church as well as sinners may learn a useful lesson from the incident of the captivity.

To Make You Think

1. What was the real cause of Israel's captivity? 2. In what respects is sin worse slavery than physical slavery? 3. Is punishment always visited upon the disobedient? 4. Do not the wicked prosper as well as the good? 5. Are our advantages greater than were those of Israel? 6. What one sin is the root of all our evil doing? 7. Where in this lesson do we learn that,—(1) sin leads to death, (2) sin is slavery, (3) the sinner